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Catholics and social action

Dublin

[1912]

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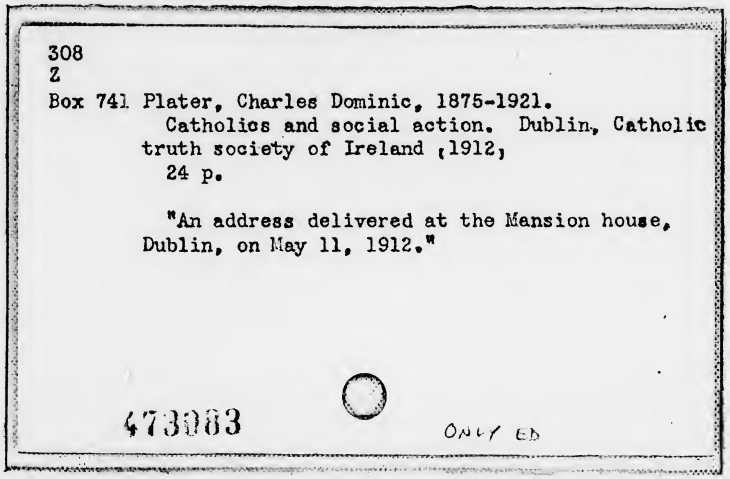

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FILM SIZE:: 35mm REDUCTION RATIO: 9:1 IMAGE PLACEMENT: IA (IIA) IB IIB

DATE FILMED: 8/29/97 INITIALS: TCM

TRACKING # : 27020

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Catholics and Social Action.

BY

REV. CHARLES PLATER, S.J., M.A.

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Anon

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Catholics and Social Action.*

THIS meeting has been organised, I understand, by the University College Conference of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. Let me say at once how glad I am to be associated in any way with such a Conference, and that for two reasons; first of all, because the Conference is, presumably, composed of young men—and young men are the most important section of the community. It is the young men that matter; they represent the coming generation, they are the hope of the Church, they have the future in their hands. Why is the future of Catholicism in France so bright though the present is so black? The future is bright because thousands of young men have taken off their coats at last and are determined to make France a Christian country once more, not by revolution, but by religious and social work. "The young men are the hope of France," said the Holy Father not long ago, and the young men are the hope of every Catholic country.

But the Catholic young man is important for another reason. He is important not only because he can shape the future, but because he can shape the present. "I write to you, young men, because you are strong," says St. John, and the young man is strong not merely with the strength of muscle and sinew, but with the strength that comes from enthusiasm, courage, divine hopefulness.

The fact is that the young men of 18 or 20 or 25 or 30 or 35 have not yet reached the dangerous age. The dangerous age generally sets in about 40 or 45, and often lasts till 60. By the dangerous age I mean the age at which a man is commonly inaccessible to fresh ideas and impervious to enthusiasm. By the dangerous

* An address delivered at the Mansion House, Dublin, on May 11, 1912.

age I mean the age at which a man puts up his intellectual shutters and hardens his heart and makes a truce with the world, the age at which he accepts things as inevitable, accepts the world's evils as incurable, and just settles down in his groove trying to save his own soul, or feather his nest, as the case may be, and, perhaps, pick up a few pieces out of the social wreckage.

At the dangerous age a man will say to his nephew, "Ah, my dear boy, I thought the same when I was young. I had ambitions and a crusading spirit. But it was no use. Crime and injustice and class hatred and destitution and degrading poverty and commercial dishonesty—they're all rampant and can't be slain. I'm twice your age; now, which of us ought to know better?"

And the young man answers demurely, "Well, uncle, you *ought* to." You see the young man is frankly optimistic. And the young man is generally right. "What?" he says, "acres of disgraceful slums in our great cities where people can't live decent human lives. Let's do away with them!" or again, "What! young children being robbed of their faith under the guise of philanthropy? Let's stop it!" "Men and women being ground down by destitution? Let's raise them up!" "The Church misunderstood and calumniated? Let's vindicate her, defend her, spread her light!"

Life, to the Catholic young man of strong faith and generous sympathies, is not a weary battle with insuperable foes, but a stirring crusade against evils which can be conquered. The young man is strong because he borrows strength from God.

All through the history of the Church we encounter the young man with his sling and a few pebbles from the brook, going out, amid much shaking of heads, to encounter and conquer very monstrous giants—giants who had come to be accepted as inevitable and insuperable.

Let me remind you of one such case—I mean that of Frederick Ozanam, founder of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. We meet him as a young law student of seventeen, when, in the year 1831, he comes to Paris,

poor, inexperienced, and full of courage, to slay an uncommonly bulky giant. Need I paint the picture of Paris in 1831? As you know it was absolutely Godless. The Church was free, but it counted for nothing. Churches and schools were open, but they were empty. Napoleon's Godless education had done its work. Infidelity had corroded the soul of France. The intellect of Paris was ranged against the Church. Ozanam only found three other students in the law school who owned to any religion at all.

He only had one pebble with which to attack his Goliath—namely, his Faith. Even that pebble had nearly been snatched from him. A year or two before he had been influenced by the current infidelity and tortured by doubts. Entering the Church one day he had sent up a prayer that was also a promise: "Oh, God, if you will give me light to see the truth I will spend my life in defending it!" The prayer was heard and the promise kept. You know how that young man, strong in his trust in God, set himself to smash the domination of infidelity, and how he did it. Humanly speaking, the task seemed impossible; but "I belong," he said, "to the party of hope." He rallied the young Catholics of Paris; he vindicated the Church by his pen; and, as I shall show, he vindicated the Church by founding the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

There you have the strength of the Catholic young man—not mere "swank," but a humble strength borrowed from God.

Now, in case there should be any here who are approaching or have actually entered the danger zone of the forties, let me hasten to assure them that the "dangerous age" is not a mere matter of years, but a frame of mind. It is not inevitable. Just as a man may be a cynic and a pessimist at 21, so a man may be a youth and an optimist at 50. It's largely a matter of will. We can't avoid middle age, but we can avoid the middle-aged heart. We can resolve to keep fresh the generosity and hopefulness of youth. "What is a great life?" asks a French writer. "A great life is a thought of youth carried out in mature years." The Saints of God all escaped the dangerous age. St. Vincent de Paul

at 80 had the hopefulness of 21. Why he only started his life work at 50. People with strong faith are least likely to develop middle-aged hearts. So I may assume with much probability that none of my audience have reached the dangerous age, and that none of them ever will.

I have said that the Conference which has organised this meeting is a University Conference. Now, that is a very happy and hopeful circumstance. A University Conference is a particularly serviceable regiment in the army of the Church. The first Conference of the Society was a University Conference, and to that fact was largely due, in God's Providence, the secret of its wide influence. The men who founded that Conference took a wide and sweeping view of Catholic charity and its place in the Church.

I want to call your particular attention to the motive which urged Ozanam to take up the work of relieving the poor. We know that some men are moved to help the poor by the mere sight of poverty. They see destitution and suffering, and their natural sympathy and Catholic instinct urge them to relieve it. This was not the case with Ozanam. What moved him in the first place was not the sight of poverty, but the sight of infidelity. It was Rationalism at a University that drove him into the slums. His action was the clinching argument that terminated a University debate. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul was born not in a slum, but in a debating society.

How did this come about? Ozanam, as we have seen, was bent on defending the Church from the attacks of the current rationalists—the followers of St. Simon. He appealed to history to show that the Catholic Church had brought the greatest blessings to mankind. "That is all very well," they answered. "We admit that the Church has done much for man in the past; it civilised him, it uplifted him, it inspired noble lives. But that is past and gone. What is the Church doing now? What social work is it doing in Paris to-day? Show us your works!"

Ozanam felt the taunt. He said to his companions: "It is true. We are not doing what we ought. We

are not carrying out the precepts of the Gospels. Let us remove this reproach; let us not be content with argument and controversy. Let us *do* something!" The Society of St. Vincent de Paul was his answer—and a triumphant answer—to the rationalistic argument. Of the wonderful history of that Society I need not speak. But I want you to notice that it was primarily started as a means of vindicating Catholic truth—of leading men on by the sight of Christ-like love for the poor to a belief in Christ's message and Christ's divinity.

I do not mean to suggest for one moment that there was any want of tender charity and real compassion in Ozanam's service of the poor. I do not mean to imply that it was a mere controversial or apologetic dodge. No. Having gone out to the poor he saw Christ in them and treated them with a genuine love and respect which should be a model to us all. Listen to some words of his which remain in my memory:—

"Those who know the road to the poor man's house, whose feet have trod the dust upon his stairs, never knock at his door without a sentiment of respect. They know that in accepting bread from their hands, as he takes light from God, the poor man honours them. They know that the theatre and every other place of amusement can be paid for, but that nothing in this world can pay for two tears of joy in the eyes of a poor mother."

There you have the real Ozanam. Let me quote another of his sayings:—

"Philanthropy is a vain woman who likes to deck herself out in her good works and admire herself in a glass; whereas charity is a mother whose eyes rest lovingly on the child at her breast, who has no thought for herself but forgets her beauty in her love."

If any man saw Christ in the poor it was Frederick Ozanam. He hated to advertise his charity. Yet, it is also true that in relieving the poor he knew that he was not only serving Christ but preaching Him. He knew that men are led to the true Church far more by the sight of Catholic charity than by heated controversy. He knew that love of the poor was a hall-mark of Catholicism—even as Christ had proved Himself Messias by preaching the Gospel to the poor.

Again, I would ask you to remember how thoughtful and how systematic Ozanam's charity was—and this in spite of its tenderness. Indiscriminate almsgiving was no part of his plan—as it was no part of the plan of St. Vincent de Paul, one of the most enlightened social reformers the world has ever seen. He sought deep down for the causes of poverty, and strove to remove them. He summoned all the best knowledge of his time to concert measures for their removal. He was not content to pick up the pieces. He strove to prevent social breakages. To that thought I shall return. I merely wish to indicate here how Ozanam's clarity was enlightened by the knowledge generated in a University. In Catholic social action there is need of thought as well as of courage. That is the upshot of what I have been saying.

But now let us see what we mean by social action and Catholic social action. If we can get clearer notions in this matter, if, like Ozanam, we can put the thing in its philosophical and historical setting, then our practical work will be all the more efficient. So I must ask you to listen patiently to what may sound rather academic and dry. Its practical bearing will appear presently.

Let us first of all clear away certain misapprehensions which are apt to gather around the word "social." The word "social" in French or German or Italian or Spanish has a fairly definite and accepted meaning—the meaning with which we are now concerned. But, unfortunately, this is not the case in English. People too often associate it in some occult way with tea-parties or the latest fashion in ladies' hats. We pick up a paper and read that the parishioners of St. Expeditus' Church enjoyed a successful "social" last Wednesday evening. Further investigation reveals the fact that they met to play bridge. Now that is an excellent thing to do, but I do want to make it clear that this is not the kind of thing we are talking about this evening. It is a capital thing for Catholics to meet together in sociable and friendly amusements, but they are not thereby acquitting themselves of their social duties. In London society the phrase "social duties" commonly denotes various conventional methods of wasting time—a concerted hunt after new sensations. I knew of one eminent man who was much pestered by hostesses who wanted him to attend their "social functions." One of them—a kind of Mrs. Leo Hunter—wrote to him to say that she would be "at home" next Thursday at four o'clock. To which he replied: "Dear Madam—So shall I."

Secondly, we must remind ourselves that social action is not the same thing as charitable action—at least, it is much wider than charity in the narrower sense of almsgiving, though, of course, all our social actions should be inspired by the spirit of charity or love of God and of our neighbour for God's sake. This point is important because it is a common mistake to suppose that our social duties begin and end with the giving of money. Money is needed for social work, but what is needed very much more is personal service. It is easy to give money—if we have it; but to take effective part in social action demands training and sacrifice not of money, but of self—of time and trouble and thought. Moreover, the methods employed in social work are much more various than in charitable work—they may include serving on public bodies, secretarial work, lecturing, cooking and playing the banjo at a boys' club.

Social work and charitable work in the strict sense of the term are, of course, complementary. Each helps the other. There will always be room for charity; there will always be need for social work.

Thirdly, let us remind ourselves, too, that social action differs from purely political action—though in Aristotle's wide sense of the term it might be regarded as a branch of politics. Politics regards our relation to the Government and society as a whole; social action regards our relation to other social groups.

There is, of course, some connection between social and political action. They supplement one another. Social action may be hampered and strangled by bad laws; it may be blocked by an unsympathetic Government. Social workers have to make efforts to get good laws passed. On the other hand, the best Government,

the best laws in the world would be useless unless there were social activity amongst a people.

Frederick Ozanam was always protesting against the fallacy of imagining that given good government and good laws, all social evils would disappear. When good laws are passed, then our social work begins. Good laws give a fair field for social work; they are not a substitute for it. To make an idol, a fetish of Government is to establish the servile State and to relinquish that liberty which the Catholic Church has won for us. The Church, we may notice, leaves us quite free in the matter of political action, save when some Catholic principle is accidentally involved; she does not leave us free in the matter of social action. She orders us as Catholics to take part in it.

And now you may ask me what I mean by Catholic social action? Does religion come into social action? Yes, it does. It must. Religion is warp and woof of life, not an added ornament. Our social work is coloured by our religion. The Catholic Church has not only a well marked traditional practice, but also certain definite social principles.

Take a concrete example. In England before the Reformation agriculture and industry were well organised. Agriculture was well organised because a quarter of the land in England belonged to the monasteries; and the monks—as even Socialist writers like Hyndman allow—were the best landlords in Europe. The standard of comfort in those days was not very high. People led plain sturdy lives. But they had economic security, they dwelt in peace under the shadow of the great abbeys and cathedrals, and their lives were full and happy human lives. Similarly, industry, though not highly developed, was well organised; it was organised by means of thousands of Guilds—religious institutions binding master and man together in a common fraternity.

There you see Catholic practice. Now, this system was ruthlessly swept away by Henry VIII. and his successors when they cut off England from the Catholic unity. They not only smashed altars and statues, but they smashed the agricultural and industrial organisations of the country. They confiscated the monastic lands for their favourites, and they dealt a death-blow to the Guilds.

What followed? Disorganisation, destitution, fierce individualism. To deal with the army of unemployed Queen Elizabeth invented the workhouse.

Then came the industrial revolution, the introduction of machinery. That story is a story of horrors. I will spare you the recital of them. I will only say that the slavery of Greece or Rome was matched in Lancashire. Why did this happen? Is machinery an evil or demoralising thing? By no means. We may thank God for it, as an American Bishop lately did. The story of the introduction of machinery into England is a story of horrors, because machinery was introduced at a time when there were no Catholic forces to guide it. Men and women were caught in the wheels of the machines—well, because Catholic theology had been banished from the land. The nation had become a nation of egoists—so the fruits of machinery went to the strong, and the weak were worse off than ever. There arose an anti-Catholic economic theory which spread over Europe—the theory of Economic Liberalism (which I need hardly say, has nothing to do with the Liberal Party in politics). This economic theory held the field, and Catholic social principles were forgotten. The theory may be compendiously summed up in the phrase, "Every man for himself, and the devil take the hindmost."

Now, of course, this state of things could not last. The practice could not last, and the theory could not last. There was bound to be a reaction. As a matter of fact, there were two reactions, both starting in the second half of the nineteenth century. One of these reactions was a false reaction—an attempt to cure a great evil by another great evil. That reaction was called Socialism. About Socialism I shall say nothing to-night except that it was based upon a wrong view of life, and backed by a defective reading of history.

The other reaction was a sound reaction, a healthy reaction. It was reassertion of Catholic social principles and practice. The Catholic Church lifted up her voice

once more amid the turmoil. She came out of the catacombs again to guide the world.

For a time she had been silenced. Even Catholics had in some degree been misled by false economic theories; but now they rallied again at the voice of the Church, which stood out between a corrupt capitalism on the one hand and Socialism on the other.

The story of the Catholic social revival during the last half century is an exciting romance.

It began in Germany. At the middle of the last century the Catholics of Germany were in a deplorable condition. They were oppressed and dispirited. The Catholic working classes were getting out of touch with the Church, the wealthier classes were apathetic, and had lost all influence. Catholics, as a body, were disorganised and outcast.

But a great leader was raised amongst them. Bishop Ketteler, of Mainz—the man of whom Leo XIII. said, "Ketteler was my great precursor"; the man of whom the historian Jannsen said, "The like of Ketteler appears in the world but once in a thousand years"—Bishop Ketteler, that great, tender-hearted giant of a man, rallied the Catholic forces, vindicated Catholic truth, and by his social action built up Catholicism in Germany. He gave the Centre party their social programme, and he initiated a world-wide movement. His books on social subjects have made history, and his spirit still stirs a continent. He unfurled the banner of Catholic social reform.

"If we wish to know our age," he said, "we must endeavour to fathom the social question. The man who understands that knows his age. The man who does not understand it finds the present and the future an enigma."

I wish I had time to tell you of his life and his work. Let me only say that any Catholic who is either blandly unconscious of our social perils or dismayed by them will do well to read the story of Bishop Ketteler.

The social action inaugurated by Ketteler was taken up by the great annual Catholic Congresses which have done so much to strengthen the Catholics of Germany. About national Catholic Congresses in general let me say this in passing; that the experience of the last 40 years has shown that there is no more effective way of deepening the Catholic consciousness of a people, evoking their zeal, and strengthening their various charitable and social organisations than the institution of an annual Catholic Congress.

Not long after this Catholic leaders in other countries were advocating and promoting Catholic social action —Vogelssang, in Austria; Decurtins, in Switzerland; de Mun, in France. Good work was done, but it met with contradiction and discouragement. What was wanted was an authoritative pronouncement from the head of the Church—a lead from the Pope.

The lead was given in 1891, when Pope Leo XIII. issued his famous Encyclical Rerum Novarum, on the Condition of the Working Classes.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of that Encyclical. It marks a turning point in the whole movement. It is the great charter of Catholic social reform. It definitely set the seal of the Catholic Church upon Ketteler's life work. It is a document which we all talk about, but I wonder how many of us have read it. Yet it is a very practical document. The late Commissioner of Labour in America, Mr. Carroll Wright, used to carry it about with him. He declared that it had done a great deal to steady the public mind in America —a great achievement, surely.

That Encyclical, as you know, contains a masterly summary of Catholic social principles; it gives us the Catholic teaching as regards the State, the right to property, the living wage, and so forth. Secondly, it indicates various practical measures of social reform that need to be taken in hand. Thirdly, it is not merely a programme. It is a ringing summons to Catholics in all parts of the world to take up the work of social reform—to study the principles and the directions contained in the Encyclical and to apply them to the actual needs of the various countries.

Now, the Encyclical has not been a dead letter. It has been and is an active and energising force. Indeed, its influence was never greater than it is to-day.

Professor Max Turmann has written a most interesting

book, called "Social Catholicism since the Encyclical," in which he describes the way in which Catholics in Germany and France and Belgium and Switzerland and elsewhere have, by means of concerted study and action, worked out the principles of the Encyclical into practical measures, and succeeded in getting those measures accepted by the legislators. You will see from that book how much modern civilisation is indebted to Pope Leo XIII.

Instead of enumerating these laws, let me describe two or three of the Catholic organisations which have been formed for the purpose of developing a Catholic social sense among the people, of instructing them in the principles of the Encyclical, of working out those principles into practice.

The "Volksverein" is an institution which keeps the Catholics of Germany in close and constant touch with Catholic social movements, stimulating and guiding them by an unbroken succession of meetings, lectures, and house-to-house visits, and by the publication of an enormous output of popular social literature. It realises that social reform must ultimately be worked out by the people themselves, and it sets itself to train the people for their task.

It now numbers over 600,000 members, and has 20,000 trained promoters who organise their respective districts, distribute literature and supply information and practical guidance. At the Central Bureau at Munchen Gladbach, we find a large staff of experts, clergy and laity, and 50 clerks, besides 50 men in the printing press. From here social and apologetic articles are sent each week to more than 400 Catholic newspapers. Millions of copies of pamphlets and magazines are issued yearly. The place is a hive of social industry. Lectures are given to priests, to students, to workmen. The result of all this and of similar action has been, that the Catholics of Germany are a close-knit, alert and powerful body, prompt to defend their religious liberties and prompt to work unselfishly for the best interests of their country. They are all the better Catholics and all the better citizens for their social training.

Take another instance. About ten years ago two

priests in France concocted a scheme which everyone declared to be quite impracticable. They said to themselves: "Now Catholics are disorganised. The working classes are disaffected, the upper classes are apathetic and don't realise the social tension. The people are being taken in by false social prophets. They have forgotten the way to the Church. Let the Church go out to them—out into the fields and out into the factories—and show them that she is their friend. Then they will listen to her, and listening to her they will respect her and will recover the old Catholic spirit. They will reorganise on sound lines, and will be proof against the seductions of modern materialism. In other words, the people of France must be given a Catholic social sense. We propose to start our crusade by issuing twopenny pamphlets."

The idea was, of course, scouted. "People won't read your pamphlets," it was said. But the two priests started work in a garret and the idea caught on. Their organisation, known to the world as Action Populaire, has its headquarters at Rheims, where there are twenty permanent editors, half of them priests, half laymen, all with University degrees, superintending the publication of pamphlets, books and reviews, the output of which has numbered many millions. There are 200 corresponding editors scattered all over France, and correspondents in every land. The productions of Action Populaire are recognised all over the world to be of first-class value. Moreover, by Congresses and Conferences and lectures the organisation gets into personal touch with all classes of the population. Needless to say, it has the most cordial support of the entire French hierarchy, and is warmly backed by the clergy.

Just one more instance. Three years ago a score of Catholics, clergy and laity, representing some of the chief charitable and social organisations in England met at Manchester. They were face to face with a great need; and that need was social education. There were in England plenty of charitable and social organisations—homes and refuges and orphanages, and the like. There was the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, the Catholic Guardians' Association, the Prisoners' Aid

Society, and so forth. But there was no organisation to bring these various bodies into touch with one another, and to co-ordinate their results, no organisation to win fresh recruits for these bodies, to provide occupation for the socially unemployed. There was no organisation to collect the statistics and information which every social worker needs. There was no organisation to help and encourage the social students, to suggest and supply literature. There was no organisation to apply the touchstone of Catholic principles to the various schemes and proposals and Bills which came before the country. The Bishops, it was known, were anxious to secure the best expert advice as to current social facts and theories and proposals; but such advice needed to be based on careful collective study. There was no Catholic University to give a lead, as at Fribourg or Louvain, so a society must be formed for the purpose.

From that conviction resulted the Catholic Social Guild. Some details about this Guild will, I am sure, interest you, for three reasons. First, because you are practical men, and to practical men the sight of effective method is always suggestive. Secondly, because many of the promoters of the Guild are Irishmen. Thirdly, because the Guild has had to meet errors and fallacies which are cosmopolitan in character, and have to be met everywhere.

What then has the Guild done during the three years of its existence? The first thing that was wanted was popular literature, and that the Guild has supplied in abundance. . . . It has brought out about sixteen penny pamphlets, the first a Bibliography, the second a translation of the "Rerum Novarum," another by the Bishop of Northampton on "The Church and Social Reformers," another by Cardinal Mercier, who takes the warmest interest in the Guild.

Then there is the "Catholic Social Year Book," published at 6d., and now in its third issue, and the "Quarterly Bulletin," sold for a penny. Of special interest is the sixpenny series of "Catholic Studies in Social Reform," an attempt to apply Catholic principles to proposed or actual legislation. Two numbers have appeared; the first deals with the much debated question

of the Poor Law and the two Reports of the recent Commission. The second deals with the Trade Board Act, and contains an excellent chapter on the teaching of the Church as regards the living wage.

Now, it is not enough to supply literature; you must get people to read it—not merely to skim it, but to study it. This is not easy, but it can be done. There would seem to be only one effective way of doing it, a way which has been used with success by Catholics on the continent, and, I might add, by Socialists in England. That way is by the starting of Study Clubs, little groups of six or eight or ten people, who arrange to meet once a week or once a fortnight to discuss social questions. These clubs may be composed of University students, or business or professional men, or workingmen; they may sometimes include ladies. The programme will vary with different clubs. Generally they will take a text-book, which may be a penny pamphlet or a six-penny manual. They may read through it together and discuss it as they go on, or they may take it in turns to write little papers on the questions that arise. They may study a theoretical question like the right to property or a practical question such as how to deal with street arabs. The point is that they are all getting their brains to work, and not merely listening to lectures. They are learning how to assimilate knowledge and how to give it out. Their efforts may be crude and tentative at first, but they are of more value than attendance at a wilderness of lectures. Interest speedily grows, as the foggy ideas become clearer and the practical bearing of the work is seen.

The Catholic Social Guild has started a large number of these Study Clubs and supplied them with literature and advice. Book-boxes or travelling libraries are lent to them at a small charge, and their difficulties are answered by correspondence.

Finally, I may mention that the Social Guild organises spiritual retreats for its members, thus insisting upon the fact that in the apostolate of social work reform must begin with oneself. It is noticeable that the great and growing movement of retreats for the laity has done much to increase the number of active social workers

and to inspire their work with a personal love of Christ Our Lord.

And, now, at this point I want to warn you against two opposite exaggerations into which it is possible for a Catholic to fall in this matter of social action—I mean the exaggeration of those who make too much of it and the exaggeration of those who make too little of it.

In a sense, of course, we cannot make too much of it. All our best energies may safely be consecrated to the service of our fellow-men in the spirit of Christ. But it is possible even for Catholic social workers to mistake the means for the end, to lose sight of the supernatural, to adopt the standards of the mere philanthropist. It is not very likely that Catholics of keen faith will do this; but it may happen. It may happen that a very active social worker may become so engrossed in the needs of the body as to forget the primary needs of the soul. It may happen that he is so occupied in scientific systems of relief as to forget the primary need of drawing people to the Sacraments. Outside the Catholic Church there is much genuine sympathy for the sufferings of the poor and the injustices which the working classes undergo; but that sympathy is too often misguided. People think that to raise the standard of comfort will necessarily make people better and happier. They think that all our troubles come from the lack of book learning. Well, the history of the Board Schools in England might suggest misgivings. Some are so bent on the building of public libraries and town halls they cry out against us for building fine churches. We may answer that anyhow our churches, built by our people, are used by our people, and that they do make people better and happier than public libraries succeed in doing.

Yet even this is urged as a reproach against us. "You make the people contented in their poverty," it is said. Well, that is an achievement to be proud of. A certain amount of poverty—I don't say degrading destitution—but a certain amount of poverty is inevitable, and if the Catholic religion can make people happy and contented in that poverty, can lift their tired eyes to a vision of peace, then we have done something which no secular

education, no sanitation, no culture, can do. We build character, and that is better than building technical schools, excellent as the latter may be. We save souls, and that is better still. If increase of happiness and virtue were proportionate to increase in wealth, then all our millionaires would be the happiest men alive, and saints to boot—which is hardly the case.

But now there is another extreme to be considered. A Catholic might say: "Poverty has been blessed by Christ. The soul is the only thing that matters. Our people have churches and the Sacraments. Why, then, should we trouble about their temporal concerns? They have the Faith: that is enough. All this seeking after material well-being is contrary to the spirit of the Gospels."

Now, I don't suppose it would occur to any of you to think that or to say that; but we are sometimes represented as saying that, and it is well to remind ourselves of the reasons why we Catholics are as keen about social reform as anyone else—indeed, more keen, and that precisely because we are Catholics. In the first place, we know that our own salvation depends upon the measure in which, according to our means, we give temporal relief to the poor, who represent Christ our Lord. "Because ye fed Me, clothed Me, visited Me—come!" our Lord will say to those who have cared for the poor. And we know the sentence He will pass on those who, having neglected His poor, have neglected Him. We are told of the bewildered amazement of those who realise too late that Christ had been among them all the time in the disguise of suffering and rags. What higher sanction could religion give us for our social and charitable work.

Secondly, we have the unbroken tradition of the Church. The Church from the beginning has considered it to be a part of her work to relieve distress. From the appointment of the Deacons by the Apostles to the opening of the last night shelter for men in Dublin, the action of the Church has been uniform. It would take a separate lecture, or a dozen lectures, to give you even a sketch of the charitable and social side of the Church. Look at the Catholic Encyclopaedia, *s.v.*

Charity, and you will gain some conception of what has been done—not at random, but systematically and scientifically, and at the same time in a tender, Christ-like spirit. Think of the multitude of religious orders which exist for the purpose of giving particular kinds of temporal relief, feeding and sheltering and assisting. The greatest social benefactors in the world's history have been the Saints of God.

Another motive, if such were needed, would be the fact that the rulers of the Catholic Church have in the strongest and plainest terms called upon us all to take part in this work, and especially upon laymen who are in positions of influence. Thus, Pope Leo XIII. has said :—

"We would have them consider for themselves that they are not free to choose whether they will take up the cause of the poor or not : it is a matter of simple duty."

And the present Holy Father has uttered a sentence which I would ask you to remember—"I forbid laymen to be inactive." Similarly, in numerous letters and allocutions the last two Popes especially have urged all to take part in the work ; for it is a work in which we all can help.

Another reason will be suggested by our own observation. The spiritual and the temporal cannot be kept in watertight compartments. They react on each other. In the first place degraded poverty is not a favourable condition for the living of a Christian life ; such poverty is not the poverty commended by Christ. When men and women are harassed and oppressed by the daily fierce struggle to live—when they cannot live a decent, healthy human life—then Christian virtues are not likely to flourish. When housing conditions are iniquitous there is no family life, and where there is no family life there is no Catholic training. What can the sweet words "father" and "mother" and "home" mean to the discouraged and scattered members of a family fiercely struggling for a crust ?

Again, if we do not spring to the relief of these people —the destitute, the homeless, the hungry—others will do so ; others, who, unselfish and generous as they often

are, cannot give the poor the best gift of all, and cannot see that the soul is more than the body. It is a very severe temptation to our Catholic poor when non-Catholic philanthropists come and offer them relief under circumstances which might prejudice their faith. Have we any right to expose our poor to such temptation? Have we any right to leave the starving widow to be tempted to sell her children ? Have we any right to leave the sweated worker without a Catholic champion ? Have we any right to leave the Catholic workingman to become the prey of plausible agitators who represent the Church as the foe to the just claims of labour ? Hitherto (we may comfort ourselves with the reflection), hitherto they have resisted. But can they resist for ever ? Non-Catholic agencies for the solution of social questions are multiplying. Catholic agencies must multiply too. The workers themselves are becoming class-conscious, they are stating their case, they are formulating their claims : let us, as the Pope orders, "go to the people" and help them to advance their claims in a Catholic spirit and in accordance with Catholic principles.

And, finally, we have that motive to which I have already alluded ; by throwing ourselves into charitable and social work we shall disarm criticism and remove suspicion—we shall draw the eyes of all men to the superior claims of the one true Church. Like Ozanam, we shall preach Christ as well as serving Him.

And, now, in conclusion, let us come nearer home and ask what Catholic charitable and social action is being taken in Ireland. What is our answer to those who, like Ozanam's adversaries, ask : "Show us your works."

Well, for answer we can show them the *Handbook of Catholic Charitable and Social Works in Ireland*, of which you all possess a copy. There they may read of multitudinous activities—of orphanages and homes and refuges, and clubs and temperance associations, and penny banks and prisoners' aid societies, and much else. The whole forms an array of charitable and social organisation, and represents an amount of generous labour and self-sacrifice, for which we may thank God.

Nor must we forget to add the large and growing extent to which the great work of agricultural and industrial improvement is being carried on by Catholics.

Special mention must, of course, be made of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, with its 3,500 adult active members relieving in 1910 over 16,000 families, and visiting over 100,000, and spending in charity over £20,000. The object of the Society is to make people "better men and better Christians," and these bare figures cannot convey the amount of good which has been done. Besides its primary work of visitation and relief, the Society engages, as you know, in what are called "special works," of which you have a number here in Dublin, such as the Orphanage, the Home for Working Boys, the Night Shelter, the Seamen's Institute, and so forth.

Excellent as these results are, they are, no doubt, capable of increase. The membership of this University Conference, for instance, is very small, indeed, and there must be many in the University and elsewhere who are out of work—I mean charitable and social work. Indeed we have only to look round any large city to see how much there is to be done. For instance, I recently paid a most exhilarating visit to a boys' club—a club for very poor boys. As soon as I entered it and read the rules, which were printed in big letters, I felt that I was in the presence of a master mind. One who knew a little about boys would make many elaborate and annoying rules for their guidance. One who knew a great deal about boys, and who had the insight of genius, would make very few. In this case there were exactly two. They are

1. KEEP ORDER.
2. DON'T SPIT.

Now, my point is, that surely there is room in Dublin, not merely for one such club, but for several. And as for the whole question of juvenile employment—well, it will tax our resources for a long time to come.

But, if I might venture to make a suggestion, it would be based on some words which I find in the

"Catholic Social Year Book for 1912." The words conclude a very interesting account of the Catholic social work which is being done in Ireland:—

"It will be noted that all the work is of the practical kind, the relief or prevention of distress and misfortune of various kinds. No organisation yet exists for the formal study by lay folk of the economic causes of all these social evils, which would aim at attacking them at their sources. Public opinion, of course, is Catholic, and there is little danger of local legislation being opposed to Catholic principles. Still a study of those principles could not fail to bring about greater co-ordination and economy of effort, and an organisation like the Catholic Social Guild would have a very beneficent effect in rousing public interest and concentrating it upon social problems."

Now, that is your suggestion, not mine. It comes from Dublin, and we may hope that it will be carried out in Dublin. Concerted social study by Catholics is one of the most pressing needs of the time; and to it the Pope has summoned us insistently.

The easiest and most fruitful way of promoting the movement is, as I have said, by means of Study Clubs, little informal groups of people meeting once a week or a fortnight, working through a simple text-book, discussing, debating, inquiring. The thing is so easily done and is so deeply interesting when once started. Give it a trial. There is now abundance of literature, and the Study Scheme provided by the Catholic Social Guild will guide beginners through the labyrinth. Initial diffidence is the only obstacle. I know of at least one such club which has lately been started in Dublin and is doing well; but obviously there is room for many.

In time the members of Study Clubs (combining study, let us hope, with a little practical work as members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul or otherwise), will find themselves getting a new insight into the greatness of the Catholic Church, the solidity and beauty of her social teaching. They will find their grasp of Catholic principles growing, their effectiveness increasing. Study Clubs will get into touch with one another and

organise—may we not hope?—into a great institution with its publications and circulating libraries and information bureau and lectures and conferences. Then all the social workers and social students of the country will be linked up, and a great impetus given to the cause of Catholic social action in Ireland.

And let me end by telling you this: Catholics in all parts of the world are looking now with sympathy and interest to Catholic Ireland and waiting for you to take not merely a place, but a leading place, in the great concerted movement of Catholic social study and social reform which is spreading over Europe. Elsewhere the work has been successful, in spite of terrific obstacles. In Ireland it should succeed better than anywhere, for nowhere else is there so fair a field. In London, for instance, we Catholics are a very small minority working against organised opposition from secularism and confronted by mountains of apathy. In Dublin you have the numbers, you have the faith, you have the spirit of charity. You have experts to guide you and the University to serve as a social study centre, and you have the prospects of a Legislature in sympathy with your social aspirations. Never was a fairer field for organised social study, and Catholics all the world over will be disappointed if you do not produce social leaders and a social literature, and, as a result of these, a social organisation which shall show forth in the highest degree the beneficent power of Catholicism.

Surely you may look forward to a realisation in Ireland of that bold and thrilling prophecy uttered by Frederick Ozanam:—

"Catholicism, full of youth and strength, will rise up and set itself to lead the people on to civilisation and happiness. Before us are the footsteps of the great men of our nation and faith; behind us our young comrades and brothers, awaiting timidly for our example."

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